

# Frequently Asked Questions

Colville National Forest Plan Revision - Draft Plan and DEIS Comment Period

## Plan Revision Process

### *What is a Forest Plan?*

A forest plan provides a strategic framework and broad guidance for making long-term management decisions for a Forest unit, while providing technical boundaries for protecting the environment. The Plans are strategic in nature and generally do not make project level decisions. Those decisions are made later only after specific proposals are made and analyzed, and there is the opportunity for public involvement.

Forest Plans also provide responsible land management direction to help guide programs, practices, uses and projects and include the following plan components: desired conditions, objectives, suitability of areas for specific types of use, special areas, standards and guidelines. Plan components are distinguished from other parts of the Plan because they can only be changed by a plan amendment.

The revised forest plan provides guidance for project and activity level decision-making and monitoring for approximately the next 15 years. Forest plans are intended to be adaptive. New knowledge and information can be analyzed and the plan changed (if appropriate). Changes to plan components are made by a formal amendment process.

### *When was the existing Colville Forest Plan approved, and why does it need to be revised?*

The Colville forest plan was put into place in 1988 and has exceeded its intended 15-year life.

National Forests are required by law (National Forest Management Act) and regulation (36 CFR 219) to have a forest plan, and to revise it every 10-15 years; when conditions or demands in the area covered by the plan have changed significantly; when changes in agency policies, goals or objectives would have a significant effect on forest level programs; or when monitoring and evaluation indicate revision is necessary.

Much has changed since the existing forest plan was approved in 1988, including changes in public values and expectations from public lands, recreation demands and types of recreation uses, demographics and development patterns, and natural resource policy. Other changes have occurred on the landscape itself; and there have been advances in our knowledge about landscape processes, science and technology. The forest has would also like to accelerate improvement in watershed condition across the forest. Even though **more than 40 amendments** have been made over time to the *existing* plan to adapt to some of those changes, they still do not fully reflect the current needs of the forest and neighboring communities. In addition, although amendments can be made to update portions of a plan for a project, it is much more efficient and a better investment of tax payer dollars to wrap these

changes into the overarching land management plan, versus doing them project by project, especially when these changes apply over large portions of the Forest.

Due to these changed conditions and the age of the forest plan, the Colville National Forest began the process of revising several years ago. The need for revision is based on legal requirements, changed conditions, and the Analysis of the Management Situation (2015).

That said, we expect that many aspects of the existing plans will be *unchanged*, such as managing recreation residences, protecting homes in the wildland urban interface, fostering rural economic development, encouraging Americans to visit their public lands, monitoring for large carnivores and managing for a variety of recreational uses.

### *How will the new forest plan differ from the 1988 forest plan?*

The new forest plan will incorporate new science and address climate change. Designation of management areas will be simplified, and management activities will be focused on restoration across the resources areas. Note that laws, regulations, and directives are not repeated or summarized in this plan (unlike the previous forest plan), but are still in force.

### *Which Planning Rule is the Colville Forest Plan Revision using?*

The June 2011 Notice of Intent (scoping notice) published in the Federal Register indicated the Forest would be revising under the provisions of the National Forest planning regulations in effect prior to November 9, 2000. That direction is referred to as the 1982 Planning Rule. (See the following website for the 1982 procedures:  
<http://www.fs.fed.us/emc/nfma/includes/nfmareg.html>)

### *What are the key issues that were identified from scoping comments received on the 2011 Proposed Action, and how are they reflected in the range of alternatives?*

Issues and comments received from the public, natural resource specialists, counties, tribes and resource agencies were reviewed and summarized. This led to six significant issues used for the development of multiple programmatic strategies (or alternatives) for revising the plan. A summary of these alternatives as well as analysis of the environmental consequences they pose are the focus of this draft environmental impact statement (DEIS). The six issues are:

- Old Forest (Late-Successional) management, and timber production
- Motorized recreation (trails)
- Access
- Recommended wilderness areas
- Wildlife
- Riparian and aquatic resource management

## *How were these six issues and public comments used to develop the range of alternatives?*

To date, there has been considerable public involvement and collaboration work on this planning process, including in depth engagement surrounding key questions related to unroaded areas, potential wilderness recommendations, motorized and non-motorized recreation, access, forest health and restoration considerations for vegetation and sustainable economics. Numerous meetings have been held in communities throughout the northeast Washington planning area, including Spokane and on the west side of the state. Two of the alternatives (B and O) were based on areas of consensus from local collaborative efforts. The planning team took a range of approaches to address each key issues throughout the 6 alternatives. The revision will continue to focus on collaboration and engaging a variety of stakeholders, including the general public, other federal, state and local agencies, elected officials, groups and organizations; Tribal government-to-government consultation, and other interested parties.

## **Community Interests**

### *Are local community interests reflected in the Draft Environmental Impact Statement*

The revised forest plan will place emphasis on the relationships among the people who live, work, and play on the national forests. National forests provide a variety of recreational and work opportunities, and opportunities to practice cultural and spiritual traditions. Local communities provide infrastructure that contributes to the capacity of the national forests to restore and maintain ecological systems.

Recognizing the mutual benefits of the relationships between social and economic components and the national forests is important to providing integrated management direction. The continuing opportunities for members of the public to engage in the plan revision process will ensure that interests and concerns are addressed as the Forest moves forward.

### *How are interests of adjacent landowners and land managers considered in forest plan revision?*

The Forest consults, cooperates, and/or coordinates with many local governments, state agencies, Washington Department of Ecology (Ecology or WADoE), Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife, Federal agencies (including the USDI Fish and Wildlife Service, Department of Homeland Security, and Federal Energy Regulatory Commission), and American Indian tribes, private entities, individuals, research institutions, and organizations.

These relationships help improve management efficiency, achieve management goals, improve overall resource management, foster consistent land management at larger scales,

and reduce potential conflicts. The Forest considers these consultation, cooperation and coordination activities, including collaborative partnerships as standard operating procedure, and, therefore, they are generally not restated as direction in the Forest Plan. State, local and tribal government resource management and land use plans provide guidance for management of lands in those jurisdictions, which are taken into consideration and help to inform the Forest Service land management planning process. Community wildfire protection plans provide well-defined avenues for coordination. County land use plans describe local government goals and objectives for land management within individual counties.

## **Recreation, Motor Vehicle, Access, Social and Economic Considerations**

### *How are the recreation settings available on the Forest affected by the plan revision?*

The forest plan acknowledges the diverse array of recreation settings across the Colville NF in a variety of ways. Much of the direction for management of recreation settings will be tied to management areas. The Recreation Opportunity Spectrum also defines a recreation desired condition. Management objectives provide emphasis for activities that lack adequate venues on the forest. Beyond this, the forest plan does not make site specific decisions regarding recreational settings.

### *Will the proposed action for the revised land and resource management plan close roads to motor vehicle use? How will it affect the way I ride my OHV or snowmobile?*

Road closures are a site-specific project level decision. The forest plan proposed action is not the process that Colville NF uses to designate their official travel systems for managed roads and trails. Those decisions are made through the Travel Planning process. The revised forest plan will, in general allow for continued use of OHVs on designated roads and trails, and within areas specifically designated open by a site-specific project level designation. Snowmobile groomed routes and cross country snowmobiling will continue to be permitted subject to project-level decisions.

### *What is a designated route or area?*

A designated route or area is a National Forest System road or trail that is designated for motor vehicle use pursuant to §212.51 on a motor vehicle use map (MVUM). The MVUM is a result of Travel Management Planning under Subpart B of the Travel Management Rule. The Forest Plan does not designate routes or areas.

## *What is the status of the Forest's Travel Management Plan?*

The Colville National Forest has completed its process of designating a travel management system, and Motor Vehicle Use Map (MVUM) per the 2005 OHV Rule Travel Management Rule.

A forest-wide motor vehicle use map (MVUM) was produced designating motorized vehicle routes, trails, and areas of compliance with 36 CFR 212.51, Subpart B and 36 CFR 216.13 of the Travel Management Rule. This map is reviewed annually, and updated as changes are needed.

More information about the Colville National Forest MVUM can be found at:

<http://www.fs.fed.us/r6/colville/travel-mgt/index.html>

## *How does the Revised Plan address public access?*

The plan components that provide guidance and strategic direction with regards to access and transportation are the desired conditions, objectives, guidelines, management areas, and suitable uses.

- *Roads and Trails Desired Condition and Guidelines:* The Revised Forest Plan includes desired conditions with associated guidelines for roads and trails.
- *Watershed Objectives:* There are objectives identified for road and trail related work to reduce sediment delivery from roads and trails to aquatic and riparian areas (hydrologic connectivity).
- *Management Area Desired Conditions:* Additionally, there are desired conditions for management areas discussed as miles per square mile.
- *Management Area Suitable Uses:* Suitable uses are identified in terms of motorized trail use in winter and summer, as well as the suitability of constructing roads within the various management areas.

## *Does the Revised Plan close any roads? Why does the Forest Service close roads?*

The Colville National Forest Plan is a visionary document that provides strategic guidance and direction. The Proposed Revised Forest Plan will provide the guidance and direction to inform road and trail decisions on a project-level basis. However, in order to close roads, additional public involvement and environmental analysis is required and will be accomplished through travel management planning or site specific project analysis. The Forest Service closes roads and trails for a variety of reasons, such as seasonal closures for wildlife habitat protection, natural resource protection, hazardous conditions, or the road has become impassable.

## *Does the Revised Plan change winter motorized access?*

The current forest plan provides direction for motorized uses associated with both seasons. It identifies where motorized recreation use may not be authorized or may be limited for the protection of aquatic, plant and wildlife habitats.

## *What are backcountry management areas and how do they relate to motorized vehicle use or mechanized uses?*

Backcountry areas are categorized into Backcountry (which is non-motorized) and Backcountry motorized. These management areas would be managed in a primitive to semi-primitive condition, but for multiple uses. Unlike designated Wilderness, motorized use is considered a suitable use in the Back Country Motorized management area as portions of these backcountry areas have roads and/or motorized trails. Motorized use is considered an unsuitable use in Backcountry Non-motorized. Most Backcountry non-motorized areas were delineated around existing roads or trails, and these areas typically overlap with Inventoried Roadless Areas, or areas with few or no existing roads.

Many activities that are not allowed in designated Wilderness areas would be allowed in backcountry management areas. Uses suitable within the backcountry management areas (but excluded from Wilderness) include structural wildlife habitat improvements; recreation facility improvements such as trail shelters, sanitary facilities and primitive campsites; and under certain conditions, special uses such as electronic sites. In addition, the use of mechanical and motorized equipment would be suitable in the maintenance and administration of lands in backcountry allocations.

## **Recommended Wilderness, Designated Wilderness, Inventoried Roadless Areas**

### *Do the alternatives include recommendations for new wilderness areas or additions to current wilderness areas?*

The No Action Alternative (which reflects the current 1988 plan) does not include any recommended wilderness. The other alternatives do include varying amounts of recommendations for wilderness, ranging from 1% to 20% of the Colville National Forest lands, all of which include some additions to the existing Salmo-Priest wilderness.

### *Who will make the decision to recommend additional wilderness?*

The decision to recommend wilderness is made by the Regional Forester at the time a decision on the Revised Forest Plan is made; however, only Congress can take the formal step to actually officially designate Wilderness. If a recommendation is included in the Regional Forester's final decision, those areas would be identified as "Recommended Wilderness" in

the forest plan until such time that Congress chooses to act (or not act) on the recommendation. In the interim, those areas would be managed to protect their long term wilderness characteristics. Alternatives vary on whether prohibited or non-conforming uses, such as mountain biking, OHV use, or snowmobile use may continue, but would not be allowed to increase in scope.

### *How will management of existing Wilderness change under the forest plan revision?*

Management of the existing Wilderness (Salmo-Priest) would not change from existing direction under any of the alternatives.

### *Can the Forest Service change Wilderness designations?*

The Forest Service does not have the authority to either designate or change, or propose to change already designated Wilderness. That authority is reserved by Congress.

### *What is the 2001 “roadless” rule? Why are there “inventoried roadless areas” with roads that are currently open to motorized vehicle use?*

The inventoried roadless process started in the 1970s; roadless areas were designated by the Clinton administration through a decision in 2001, known as the 2001 Forest Service Roadless Area Conservation Rule (RACR). It also went through a public process. That decision was then litigated and went through the court system. But ultimately the decision still required us to carry forward the inventoried road-less areas identified in that environmental analysis. In some cases, there are existing roads and trails within the inventoried road-less areas. These roads will continue to remain accessible to motorized vehicles where that use is consistent with the Proposed Revised Forest Plan, and any decisions to close specific roads or trails would require separate site-specific environmental analysis with associated public involvement (NEPA).

### *How do Inventoried Roadless Areas relate to Forest Plan direction?*

A. Inventoried Roadless Areas (IRAs), as established in the 2001 Forest Service Roadless Area Conservation Rule (RACR), are allocated to varying management areas, with the majority being allocated to three primary management areas: Recommended Wilderness, Backcountry and Backcountry Motorized. The desired conditions, suitable uses, standards, and guidelines for these management area designations align with the regulations outlined in the 2001 Roadless Area Conservation Rule. Prohibitions within IRAs (subject to limited exceptions) include road construction and reconstruction; and the cutting, sale, or removal of timber.

## *What is the difference between Inventoried Roadless Areas, Potential Wilderness Areas and Recommended Wilderness?*

The Forest Service first identified roadless areas in the 1970s during the Roadless Area Review and Evaluation (RARE I and RARE II) process used to evaluate areas for potential wilderness recommendation to carry out the 1964 Wilderness Act. These roadless areas later came to be known as “Appendix C Inventoried Roadless Areas” as they are listed in Appendix C of the 1988 Colville Land and Resource Management Plan. These same roadless areas were identified in the 2001 Roadless Rule maps at which time they became commonly known as Inventoried Roadless Areas (IRAs).

Potential Wilderness Areas (PWAs) were identified during the early stages of the current Forest Plan Revision process (2005-2008). The IRAs identified in the 2001 Roadless Rule were used as the starting point for many of the Forest’s PWAs. The second step in identifying additional PWAs was to map any areas on the Forest that were larger than 5,000 acres and did not contain any active National Forest System Roads (the areas, however, could contain old road beds). As a result, many 2001 IRAs (those IRAs less than 5,000 acres did not qualify as a PWA) were brought forward into the plan revision process as PWAs. In addition, the Forest identified several additional PWAs that met the 5,000 acre and no system road requirement.

Recommended Wilderness is a subset of the PWAs that were finalized in 2008-2009 as part of the Forest Plan Revision process. All PWAs were evaluated by the Forest Plan Revision team specialists against identified criteria in order to be considered as recommended wilderness. Each of the PWAs were determined to be eligible for wilderness recommendation. The six alternatives associated with the draft environmental impact statement offer a varying level of recommended wilderness that reflects both public comment and the need to balance the various social and ecological goals associated with the Forest’s roadless areas.

## *Why is there a designated Wilderness area in the Colville National Forest and why does the Proposed Revised Forest Plan recommend additional Wilderness areas?*

The Wilderness Act (1964) initially protected 54 Wilderness areas (9.1 million acres) across the nation and established a process for adding new lands to the National Wilderness Preservation System; this Act designated the Salmo Priest Wilderness area on the Colville National Forest in 1984, it currently has a total of 43,348 acres.

The 1982 planning rule requires the Forest to inventory and evaluate potential Wilderness areas. Potential Wilderness areas identified during this process are further analyzed against an established set of evaluation criteria. In this planning cycle, we are required to use the process for identifying potential Wilderness areas outlined in FSH 1909.12, Chapter 70 (2007), which has two phases: inventory and evaluation. The Wilderness evaluation process is a requirement for the Revised Forest Plan process. A range of alternatives was developed for the Draft Environmental Impact Statement (DEIS) that included varying amounts of recommended Wilderness area. The different alternatives provide differing amounts of recommended Wilderness area and the Regional Forester will select the alternative.

## *What activities are suitable in Recommended Wilderness?*

The Draft Revised Forest Plan includes a desired condition that provides for uses that are conducive to maintaining the inherent Wilderness character of the Recommended Wilderness. Uses or activities identified in the suitable use matrix of the Proposed Revised Forest Plan are displayed below (draft revised plan page 126):

| Activity or Use  | May Authorize     | May not authorize  |
|--|-------------------|--|
| Facilities, administrative   |                   | X  |
| Facilities, developed recreation   |                   | X  |
| Federal Energy Regulation Commission licenses or permits   |                   | Recommend against  |
| Prescribed fire  | X                 |  |
| Wildfire, use of unplanned ignition  | X                 |  |
| Forest products, commercial use (non-timber harvest)   |                   | X  |
| Forest products, firewood, commercial use  |                   | X  |
| Forest products, firewood, permitted personal use  |                   | X  |
| Forest products, personal use  | X                 |  |
| Grazing, permitted   | X                 |  |
| Infrastructure, above ground infrastructure associated with special use permits, such as communication sites, energy developments, and/or utility lines. |                   | X<br>Exception: Only USFS radio repeaters needed for dead zones within or adjacent to area |
| Mechanized recreational use, summer  | X<br>existing use | X<br>new or additional use   |
| Minerals, leasable – surface occupancy   |                   | X  |
| Minerals - locatable   | X                 |  |
| Minerals, saleable   |                   | X  |
| Motorized recreational use, summer, trails or play areas   |                   | X  |
| Motorized recreational use, winter, trails or cross-country off highway vehicle use  |                   | X  |
| Non-motorized recreational use, summer   | X                 |  |
| Non-motorized recreational use, winter   | X                 |  |
| Road construction, permanent   |                   | X  |
| Road construction, temporary   |                   | X  |
| Special use permits, recreational & research   | X                 |  |
| Timber harvest as a tool   |                   | X  |
| Timber harvest, scheduled production   |                   | X  |
| Utility corridors  |                   | X  |

## *Is over-snow-vehicle (OSV) a suitable use in Recommended Wilderness?*

Over-snow-vehicles are determined unsuitable within Recommended Wilderness Area as

presented in the above table.

Are there additional public comment opportunities and National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) processes to provide input on Recommended Wilderness?

Wilderness recommendations in the Draft Revised Forest Plan are prepared through the current NEPA process, which includes additional input from the public during the comment and objection periods. There are no subsequent NEPA processes. However, the designation process conducted by Congress often includes years of congressional committee hearings where the public, government officials, and members of Congress provide additional input into the decision making process and may result in a Wilderness Study area as an interim step prior to designation.

### *What is the Forest Service's definition of Wilderness? It seems that not all Wilderness areas are necessarily pristine. Some Wilderness areas contain old logging roads, stumps, etc.?*

The Forest Service definition of Wilderness is based on the statutory language found in The Wilderness Act (Public Law 88-577). Section 3(c) of the Act states that a Wilderness area “generally appears to have been affected primarily by the forces of nature, with the imprint of man’s work substantially unnoticeable.” While designated Wilderness areas strive to encompass “primeval character” and “natural conditions,” some areas may contain remnants of past land use activities, a legacy from previous decades that in some cases contribute to the scientific or historical value of the area.

### *Are wildland fire management activities allowed within Recommended Wilderness?*

Wildland fires within Recommended Wilderness can be suppressed using standard suppression tactics. Minimum Impact Suppression Tactics (MIST) are often applied to reduce suppression impacts to these primitive backcountry settings and their related Wilderness values. Wildland fire can also be managed for resource benefit within Recommended Wilderness, and planned ignitions (prescribed fire) can also be applied, where both activities use the same MIST principles to reduce overall management related impacts to Wilderness values and characteristics.

### *What are the percentages of Management Areas in Wilderness and Inventoried Roadless Area (IRA) compared to General Forest?*

Although all alternatives include management area allocations with applicable desired conditions, standards, and guidelines, the land management emphasis, acres, names, and associate plan components of the management areas vary by alternative.

An overview of Recommended Wilderness acres is described in Table 11 (page 62) of the DEIS.

### *How are Wild and Scenic Rivers addressed in the Colville National Forest draft plan?*

There are no congressionally designated Wild and Scenic Rivers on the Colville National Forest. There are currently river segments that are “eligible” for recommendation. Rivers identified in the existing forest plans will move forward into the revised plan.

## **Vegetation**

### *What is Historic Range of Variability and why is it important?*

Historic range of variability (HRV) analysis was used to evaluate forest structure. The historical range of variability refers to the dynamic behavior and functioning of ecosystems before dramatic changes occurred with European settlement, generally considered to be the mid-1800s for this area (Aplet and Keeton 1999). The historical range of variability provides a framework to determine changes to ecosystem attributes that have occurred between historical and current conditions and recognizes that ecosystems experience a range of conditions across which processes are resilient and self-sustaining. When allowed to move beyond the limits of the range of variability, ecosystems move into a state of disequilibrium or disorganization.

### *How would old forest be managed under the preferred alternative?*

The preferred alternative uses a “whole landscape” approach for providing late forest structure, allowing late structure forests to shift location in response to ecological process. These types of management enables closer approximation of natural disturbance regimes by allowing closer approximation of natural disturbance regimes that can move around the landscape with disturbance. Under the preferred alternative restoring late forest structure can occur within all management areas across the Forest. Within managed land allocations approximately 78 percent of the land base consists of high or moderate site productivity, thus allowing a substantial land base for restoring and maintaining late forest structure.

### *How would fire (planned and unplanned ignitions) be used as a tool under the preferred alternative?*

Under the preferred alternative fire will be used as a tool to meet land management objectives in different ways. Planned ignitions will be used as a slash disposal method within mechanically treated units, and would include pile burning, broadcast burning, and underburning. In addition, planned ignitions will be used as a treatment method in areas where fuels have not been mechanically treated, potentially across large, landscape areas of

natural fuels. Unplanned ignitions will be used as a tool during times where weather and fuel conditions would create fire effects that would contribute to meeting land management objectives, and only in places where fire movement off of National Forest lands would not be reasonably expected.

### *Will all vegetation treatment methods be available to local managers?*

The draft forest plan contains a full array of treatment tools including commercial and non-commercial options.

### *How much timber volume would not be harvested due to the Recommended Wilderness designation?*

Most Recommended Wilderness falls within current inventoried roadless areas (IRAs). Some timber exists in these areas, but commercially harvesting it is difficult because they are steep with little access, many areas have shallow soils, and often have small diameter trees. Trees may be harvested within designated IRAs, but harvest activities require authorization by the Chief of the Forest Service.

### *Will the forest plan have an allowable sale quantity (ASQ)?*

Yes, the revised forest plan will include an ASQ calculation.

### *Will special forest products still be available under the new plan?*

Yes, special forest products (such as firewood, mushrooms, huckleberries, etc.) will still be available under the new plan. Personal and commercial use of forest products will continue subject to existing regulations. Collection of special forest products will be guided by the terms stated on collection permits.

### *How does the Draft Revised Forest Plan address salvage of burned large wood/timber?*

While the decision to salvage burned trees would be a separate decision, the Draft Revised Forest Plan provides strategic guidance and direction with regards to the appropriate management areas where timber harvest is suitable, including desired conditions, standards, and guidelines. Timber salvage would be suitable in management areas where timber production and harvest are considered suitable. Additionally, any salvage projects would follow the forest-wide standards and guidelines for which all projects must be consistent.

## *Does the Proposed Revised Forest Plan address noxious weeds?*

Yes, effects to invasive plants are disclosed in Chapter 3 of the DEIS. The draft revised plan includes desired conditions, standards, guidelines, and objectives for terrestrial and aquatic invasive species.

## **Aquatics – Water Quality and Fish Habitat**

### *What direction guides how the plan revision addresses water quality?*

Although not repeated in the draft forest plan, the FEIS discusses several existing laws and national and regional directives that provide the framework for protection of water quality on the Colville National Forest. These include direction such as best management practices and compliance with the Clean Water Act. Providing clean and high-quality water is part of the Forest Service mission.

### *How does the draft forest plan manage and protect for water quality?*

The draft forest plan includes desired conditions, standards, and guidelines that ensure that water quality will be protected and improved. In addition, the draft forest plan includes objectives for watershed restoration to improve water quality, watershed function, and fish habitat. Key and priority watersheds are used to prioritize restoration objectives.

### *What factors on forest lands affect water quantity and how does the revised forest plan protect and maintain water quantity?*

Effects of forest stand condition and forest practices on water quantity, including water yield and peak flows, are highly variable and have generally not been studied at a forest-level scale (or at a scale larger than a 5<sup>th</sup> field watershed). The hydrology report of the DEIS includes a detailed discussion of the literature on the effects of vegetation removal through timber harvest, salvage, or die-off from fire or insects and disease on water yield and peak flow, however these effects are variable in both magnitude and duration. Generally it is difficult to make conclusions on effects of forestry management practices and stand condition on water yield and overall water quantity at the scale of the forest plan. However, forest practices that increase and preserve watershed and riparian function, including best management practices, forest plan components (desired conditions, objectives, standards, and guidelines), and vegetation management activities that increase resiliency to disturbance are expected to improve landscape resiliency to low flows.

The revised forest plan includes components to improve and restore hydrologic function, which allows the landscape to hold water longer and release water slower in the summer

months when streamflow is low. Desired conditions for water resources provide the framework for hydrologic function, and implementation of the revised forest plan would move the CNF toward these desired conditions. Watershed restoration objectives outline specific activities that will improve landscape function and resiliency. In addition, the revised forest plan includes a robust set of standards and guidelines for protection of water resources and riparian management areas.

### *How does the revised forest plan address consumptive water uses and their role in water quantity?*

NFS lands are critical to water supply; 14% of the nation's waters originate on National Forests and provide water for consumptive uses and in-stream flows. The hydrology section of the DEIS discusses consumptive water uses in the context of water available for more intensive downstream uses. Consumptive water uses in the name of the Colville National Forest are a small percentage (<1%) of consumptive uses at the scale of each of the five subbasins on the Colville National Forest.

### *How does the Forest Plan and DEIS analyze potential effects of climate change on water quantity?*

The hydrology section of the DEIS uses several tools from recently published work that analyze the potential impacts of climate change on both snowpack and summer low flow. An analysis comparing peak snowpack (April 1) between El Nino (warm, dry) and La Nina (cold, wet) years showed that approximately 18% of the Colville Administrative Forest is within the zone where snowpack is most sensitive to warmer, drier climatic patterns. In these areas, timing of peak snowmelt in the warmest, driest years occurred more than 30 days earlier than the coldest, wettest years.

Less snow means earlier runoff and the potential for less water in the summer months. While the magnitude of change in summer low flow in streams on the Colville National Forest is projected to be less than in other regions across the Pacific Northwest east of the Cascade Mountain Range, forest practices within the revised forest plan, including moving conditions toward HRV, implementation of BMPs, and desired conditions, objectives, standards, and guidelines build landscape resiliency to potential impacts of projected changes in snowpack and summer low flows.

### *Must projects help move aquatic and riparian habitats towards desired conditions for these habitats?*

Yes, projects that may affect aquatic and riparian habitats would be designed to help move these habitats towards desired conditions, through coordination and consideration of other land use needs.

Can priority watersheds for active restoration of watershed function, and riparian and aquatic habitat improvement, change if there is a need to switch priorities?

A key watershed is one that has some semblance of good condition with presence of productive fish populations. Priority watersheds for active restoration are selected from among the watersheds chosen as Key Watersheds. Key watersheds will not change, but watersheds targeted for active restoration may be reprioritized and others selected if the need exists.

*Will the Preferred Alternative contribute to maintaining or restoring viability for aquatic Threatened or Endangered populations of the focal aquatic species selected to represent species diversity in the planning area?*

Yes, the preferred alternative incorporates the Region 6 Aquatic Riparian Conservation Strategy intended to contribute to maintaining or restoring populations of the selected focal species, threatened and endangered species, and will contribute to maintaining species diversity in the planning area.

*How will riparian and aquatic habitats be managed?*

All alternatives include desired conditions, objectives, standards and guidelines to address riparian conditions and fish habitat. The alternatives vary in specific direction, but all include direction based on either the Inland Native Fish Strategy (INFISH) or the Aquatic Restoration and Conservation Strategy.

*What kinds of watershed restoration actions are proposed and how will watershed conditions be improved?*

The Draft Revised Forest Plan does not describe specific actions that will take place, but describes objectives for improvement in watershed, soil, riparian, and aquatic habitat conditions. Forest vegetation conditions are expected to improve in all alternatives and this contributes to improved watershed conditions. The analysis in the DEIS suggests that decreasing sediment delivery and the hydrologic effects of roads will improve overall watershed conditions.

## **Livestock Grazing**

*Will grazing continue to be allowed on the Colville National Forest?*

Yes, existing livestock grazing will continue, subject to the terms and conditions of permits. As grazing permits expire, they are renewed without changes until the Forest completes NEPA and updates the Allotment Management Plan in accordance with the Rescission Act of

1995, PL 104-19. Site-specific project NEPA decisions will be made to re-authorize grazing as appropriate. Those NEPA decisions must be consistent with the forest plan.

### *How many acres will be available for grazing?*

Approximately 363,845 acres (33%) of the Forest are classified as capable for cattle grazing, and 448,160 acres (41%) are suitable for sheep grazing. There are a total of 58 allotments on the Forest; 42 are active, and 16 are not currently grazed. Of the 16 vacant allotments, 7 are likely to be used again in the foreseeable future. An animal unit month (AUM) is the amount of forage used by a cow and a calf pair, one horse, or five sheep or goats for one month. AUMs have fluctuated between approximately 28,000 and 33,000 over the past 10 years (Fletcher 2015), and forest plan alternatives do not propose changes to allotment boundaries, use, or AUMs. However, standards and guidelines pertaining to range management differ by alternative and are analyzed in the Environmental Consequences section.

## **Terrestrial Wildlife**

### *Were Surrogate Species used in the viability analysis?*

Yes. An extensive effort was made following a Regional process to identify and group species for which there were known or potential viability concerns. Surrogate species were then identified that represented the habitats and risk factors for a group of species. Again, following a Regional process, the viability of each of the Surrogate species was assessed for the current condition in order to identify important factors to address in the development of the action alternatives. For example, the impacts of roads on habitats for several of the surrogate species was identified as a risk-factor. Thus, some of the alternatives include a range of approaches on how to reduce the negative impacts of roads. The potential contribution that each alternative would make to the viability of the surrogate species was evaluated for each alternative, in both the short-term (<20 years) and longer-term (>50 years).

### *How will you address species that fall outside of the “surrogate” species concept?*

Surrogate species are intended to serve as an indicator of ecosystem sustainability. Surrogate species were purposefully selected to represent the full range of habitat and risk factors that in turn affect a broad range of other wildlife species. By addressing the habitat needs and risk factors for the surrogate species, it is assumed that ecosystems would then support a broad array of species. In addition to the surrogate species, federally listed species were addressed individually, as required by law and policy.

## *How does the current situation with woodland caribou affect Forest Planning?*

The Woodland Caribou was federally listed as an endangered species in 1984. The population was estimated between 27 and 46 animals during annual counts occurring from 2002 to 2012. The caribou recovery area is 1,477 square miles in size and comprised of lands managed by the Colville National Forest, Idaho Panhandle National Forest, Idaho Department of Lands, and British Columbia. About 47 percent of the recovery area is in the US and 53 percent in British Columbia. The caribou recovery area is divided into 17 Caribou Management Units, four of which occur on the Colville National Forest.

A caribou management area identified in the existing Forest Plan (completed in 1988) has been used to guide management. However, new science has identified winter recreational activities as an important issue to address in relation to caribou recovery; this was not addressed in the existing land management plan. In 2001, the USFWS issued a new Biological Opinion on the 1988 Forest Plan with terms and conditions that required a winter recreation strategy be completed that balanced the needs of secure winter habitat for caribou with access for winter recreation activities. Thus, a recreation strategy was developed in 2003. In 2012, the USFWS designated 30,000 acres of national forest lands at or above 5,000 feet in elevation as critical habitat for woodland caribou. Thus the revised Forest Plan would incorporate the winter recreation strategy and critical habitat for woodland caribou.

## *How does the current situation with grizzly bear affect Forest Planning?*

Management direction for grizzly bear recovery was included in the original Forest Plan. This direction would be carried forward into the revised Forest Plan. The Selkirk Grizzly Bear Recovery Area is located in northeastern Washington and includes parts of Washington, Idaho, and British Columbia. The Selkirk recovery area was included in the original overall grizzly bear recovery plan for the US. One of the key aspects of grizzly bear recovery is human access management. Access management remains one of the most influential tools used to contribute towards the recovery of grizzly bear populations. Measures of the degree of human influence on grizzly bear habitat are based on methods developed by the Interagency Grizzly Bear Committee Access Management Task Force. Based on this approach, areas with relatively limited human access are referred to as core areas and are tracked in Grizzly Bear Management Units (GBMUs) that have been identified throughout the recovery area. Table 147 shows the current amount of core area in the GBMUs within the Forest Plan Revision area. The Selkirk recovery area has been stratified into management situation 1, 2, and 3 areas that are used to determine where management direction is applied. Areas outside of the recovery area but still on the Colville National Forest are managed as management situation 5.

## *How does the current situation with Canada Lynx affect Forest Planning?*

In 2000, Canada lynx was listed as a Threatened species, and in 2005 core, secondary, and

periphery areas were identified to emphasize their importance for the recovery of lynx (USFWS 2005). To date, no recovery plan for Canada lynx has been completed. Current management guidance is provided through the Canada Lynx Interagency Agreement that relies on the science summarized in the Canada Lynx Conservation Assessment and Strategy. This agreement was intended to remain until it is replaced by management direction given in revised Forest Plans. There is a need to revise the Forest Plan to incorporate the emphasis areas identified by US Fish and Wildlife Service and to replace the interim policy given in the Interagency Agreement. On the Colville National Forest, the Kettle-Wedge area is identified as a Core Area for lynx, the Selkirk Mountains as Secondary Area, and the Okanogan Highlands (west of the Kettle Mountains) as Peripheral Areas. No critical habitat was identified for Canada lynx on the Colville National Forest.

### *What is habitat connectivity and how is it managed?*

Habitat connectivity refers to the ability an animal to move among separated patches of suitable habitat, and is important for providing the long-term viability of populations and for allowing species to respond to changing environmental conditions. Animals need to be able to move efficiently to access food, shelter, mates, and other basic needs. In addition, animals need to move beyond their home ranges to find unoccupied habitat and maintain genetic exchange between groups. Landscape features influence how or if an animal can move. Natural features such as rugged topography and land cover type, and anthropogenic, or human created barriers, such as highways and human development, can all affect an animal's ability to successfully move through an area. Factors that influence habitat connectivity that are addressed in the revised Forest Plan include restoring the amount and spatial arrangement of habitats to better mimic historical patterns, and reducing the effects of road and road networks on wildlife habitats.

## **Economics**

### *How does the Forest Service analyze the economic contribution to the communities?*

The Draft Environmental Impact Statement, Volume II, Chapter 3 has a detailed Economic and Social analysis. The analysis gives projections with regards to the economic contribution each alternative will give to the Forest.

### *Why isn't the economic goal the highest priority for the Forest Service?*

The Forest Service is a multiple use management agency. As stewards of the land, we must balance land use while maintaining ecological diversity and resiliency. In caring for long-term ecological sustainability, social uses, goods, and services follow by balancing economic and social outputs with the needs to sustain ecologically diverse and resilient landscapes.

## *How did budgets factor into the alternative development?*

Alternatives were based on issues and concerns received by the public and resource needs defined by Forest Service specialists. Budget was not a factor for determining significant issues or alternatives.

## **NEPA Process and Commenting**

### *What is being done for consultation on sacred places and uses for all of the native tribes surrounding the Colville National Forest?*

Federal Trust Responsibility and Tribal Rights and Interests--American Indian tribes are sovereign nations. They are government entities with which the Forest Service has established and continues to maintain government-to-government relationships. In government-to-government consultation, the Forest Service acknowledges the sovereignty of federally recognized American Indian tribes, and the special government-to-government relationship between the tribes and the United States through Executive Order 13175 (November 6, 2000).

More specifically, government-to-government consultation is ongoing between the Forest Service and the Confederated Tribes of the Colville Reservation, the Kalispel Tribe, and the Spokane Tribe of Indians.

We have worked with and provided information to all surrounding tribes asking for input on the Draft Revised Forest Plan. Occasionally the specialists from the tribes meet with the Forest Plan Revision team to discuss specific plan issues.

### *What is a substantive comment and does it give people standing in the objection period?*

Comments that provide relevant and new information with sufficient detail and rationale are the most useful and are referred to as substantive comments. Specific comments that relate directly to information provided in the draft plan or draft EIS documents and alternatives would be helpful at this stage. Providing comments during the comment period provides standing for the commenter to object to the draft record of decision.

### *Can I comment on what I like about the different alternatives?*

Yes, in telling us what you do and do not like about the alternatives, be as specific as you can about your rationale and propose a solution.

### *What happens if we don't make comments during the DEIS comment period?*

In order for an objection to be considered during the objection process, the objector must have

earned standing in the process. In order to earn standing the objector must have made a substantive comment during the official opportunities to comment. Comments allow you to object. If there are substantive changes between the Draft and Final, you may also object based on that new information (36 CFR 219). Generally, the objection should pertain to the comments made during other formal comment periods in order to have standing.

### *Can you clarify how we can compare the alternatives?*

The DEIS has two locations where there is a comparison of alternatives: the Executive Summary and Chapter 2. The Executive Summary provides a high-level overview of the alternatives and a comparison of alternatives in terms of projected outputs. Chapter 2 provides a more detailed description of the alternatives and how the issues raised during scoping were addressed. Another location for comparing alternatives is the interactive map on the Forest Plan Revision website (<http://www.fs.usda.gov/detail/colville/landmanagement/planning/?cid=stelprd3824594>).

### *How much weight do you give to comments from people not from this area?*

The Colville National Forest is one of 154 National Forests across the nation, therefore they are a resource that is utilized and enjoyed by everyone in the country. Comments are the same no matter where you come from. The commenting process in NEPA is not a vote. Comments made by the public within the communities surrounding the National Forests tend to be more specific and provide more detail, which can help them be more useful in revising the Revised Forest Plan and DEIS.

### *What's the process after the DEIS comment period for incorporating our comments into the document, and for the Record of Decision?*

The initial phase will include a content analysis where we will group similar comments and concerns. A report is generated from the analysis that identifies the concerns from all the comments and the Interdisciplinary Team (IDT) will then work on responding to the concerns/comments. The IDT will also start working with the Forest leadership team to discuss the nuances and recommend to the responsible official (regional forester) whether comments are addressed in existing alternatives, should be addressed through development of a new alternative, or should be addressed through modification of an existing alternative. The Forest Supervisor will then work with the Regional Forester and Regional Staff to determine which alternative should be selected that incorporates the comments and provides best overall management direction for the Forest. Following analysis of these changes, the IDT will revise the Forest Plan and environmental impact statement and develop a Record of Decision.

## General Questions

### *How is Scenery Management considered in the proposed action?*

Providing high quality scenery has long been a goal of the Forest. The revised forest plan will continue to emphasize providing high scenic quality. Areas such as Scenic Byways managed by the Forest will continue to be managed to retain their visual character.

### *Does the Proposed Revised Forest Plan address mining and mineral exploration?*

The Mining Act of 1872 gave all citizens of the United States, and those intending to become citizens, the right to locate mining claims on public lands and gave them the right to explore and recover the minerals on those claims. Forest Service Regulations found at 36 CFR 228 Subpart A apply to locatable minerals and the protection of surface resources on mining claims located on National Forest System (NFS) lands. These regulations allow the Forest Service to condition mining activities and operations to minimize adverse environmental impacts to surface resources. The Forest Service does not regulate the management of mineral resources; those management responsibilities lay with the Secretary of the Interior.

The Proposed Revised Forest Plans provide standards and guidelines that will prevent or minimize the impacts of mining activities on lands managed by the Colville National Forest and to be consistent with other State and Federal Regulations.

### *Is the science from the Interior Columbia Basin Ecosystem Management Project (ICBEMP) used in the revised forest plan?*

Colville National Forest's DEIS did not use much from the original ICEBMP report(s), but there were subsequent studies and reports that came out of that effort where the science has been used.

### *How is climate change considered in the Draft Revised Forest Plan?*

The topic of climate change is considered throughout the Draft Revised Forest Plan and Draft Environmental Impact Statement (DEIS). Many of the desired conditions in the Plan factor climate change and ecological resilience into them. The DEIS has an entire section devoted to climate change and cumulative effects associated with climate change are described in many of the effects analysis sections.

*Once there is a final revised forest plan, how will you notify the public on site-specific decision processes based on these Forest Plan?*

There are various ways the public is notified of activities on each of the Forests. The primary way a Forest notifies the public of the proposed actions is through the schedule of proposed actions (SOPA), available on each of the Forest web sites. The SOPA is distributed quarterly, and includes all the site-specific projects scheduled to occur, with the specific contact person. In certain instances there may be legal notices in the paper announcing the scoping or comment periods. Occasionally, there are public meetings.